


GRAPHIC ARTS CLUB



In Memoriam

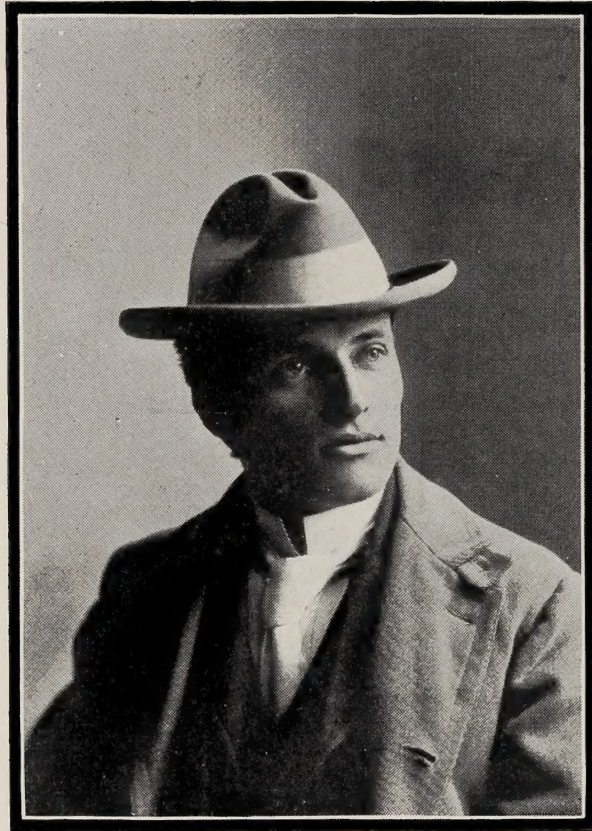
Neil McKechnie

June 24th, 1904



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THE LATE NEIL McKECHNIE

THE Graphic Arts' Club
wish to place on record
their high opinion of their late
Member, Neil McKechnie, who
was drowned while running a
rapid in Metagami River in
the Hudson's Bay Country,
June 24th, 1904.

The Red Gods Called



N the bulletin board of the Graphic Arts' Club in Melinda street is pinned to-day this notice :

IN MEMORIAM
NEIL MCKECHNIE
DROWNED JUNE 24TH, 1904

SOMEWHERE in those dark spruce woods that called him every spring, by a tumbling rapid, will be, by now, an axe-hewn cross with a similar inscription :

NEIL MCKECHNIE
DROWNED HERE JUNE 24TH, 1904

THEY will call the place McKechnie's Falls, perhaps, and with time the thing will grow into a legend. And a fit hero for legend was "poor old Mack."

DOWN at the Arts' Club they say the world—the artists' world, at any rate—one day would have had a high place for Neil McKechnie. They say he was a Canadian, a real Canadian, of a type of which we have but few. Foreign-taught painters of Canadian landscape have we, and Canadian-taught painters of foreign landscapes, but an artist with the spirit of Canada's youth in his heart—wild, free, strong, untrammelled of convention—where is he? Mack, they say, had been that artist one day, had not the Red Gods called.

FEW could tell what lay in his conviction as sturdily, as honestly and with as frank a gaze as Mack. None could contradict so flatly, and yet no contradiction gave so little offence as his. With him principle and truth counted alone. No respecter of persons was he, youth or age, or station or degree; a truth was a truth, and out it must. But his eye was ever as frank as it was blue, as kindly as undaunted.

THOSE who knew the old Mahlstick Club, now so sadly scattered, will remember those fierce arguments on Art in which McKechnie laid down the law bare-naked, as his conviction urged; always dogmatic as became a Scotchman, always convinced and clinched in his own opinion, yet tolerant withal—and kindly.

POOR Mack! It's a sad business to hark back to those old Mahlstick days now.

THEY'VE scattered—those good fellows—one by one, and now it's Mack.

THE mystery of the North got his heart—its wildness, its sombreness, and most of all, its strength. Strength itself was beauty, and the raw strength of the granite-ribbed wilderness best satisfied his longing.

AND now the North has got him altogether. He's run his last rapid. He's finished his trip. His paddle is flung ashore. Poor Mack! He'd hardly got round the first bend!

MACK, you ever-cheerful, ever-honest, ever-dogmatic Scotchman, we'll miss you, old chap, next winter—at the club—when the model comes down from the throne and it's time to call for a song. There'll be no life in it at first—that song—for we'll miss you—miss you—we will.

SID HOWARD.

ED. Note.—Neil McKechnie, a young artist of strong promise, from this city, was drowned while running a rapid on the Metagami River, New Ontario, on Friday, June 24th. The artists and art students of Toronto had always expected much from McKechnie, because from his temperament it seemed likely he would go far and straight in the direction of Canadianism in art. The above appreciation, written by a close friend of his, expresses pretty closely the general regard in which young McKechnie was held among the Toronto artists and their associates.

TORONTO SATURDAY NIGHT, JULY 9TH, 1904

HUDSON'S BAY POST, METAGAMI,

JUNE 25TH, 1904.

DEAR SID,

NO doubt ere this you will have received the extremely sad intelligence of Neil's drowning. We were within about four miles of the post when the catastrophe occurred. It was in running a rapid. We had two canoes, one 16 feet and one about 19, in which we were bringing our supplies.

LARRY Larone and I were in the small canoe, and had run it safely and waited below. The other canoe rounded the bend and struck a rock when about half way down. Neil was in the bow, Roby in the middle, and Hubert in the stern. They managed to get off this rock, but had gone only a short distance when they hit another. The canoe swung around, and the stern caught. She filled and swung free. Just between an eddy and the current Roby struck for shore, thinking that the canoe would not hold the three.

NEIL took this as a tip to follow, and that was practically the end. You know he could not swim. He splashed around in the water for about ten seconds, then sank. By the time he went down, Hubert who had remained in the canoe, had grounded, and Roby had reached the shore.

FROM where Larry and I were waiting across the river to where the accident occurred was about a hundred feet, and the current was between us. We were waiting in an eddy on the opposite side of the river. It would have been madness for us to try and cross the current, but as soon as the canoe started to fill we started across below and up the current. Neil went down when we were within about twenty-five feet of him.

THERE is a series of rapids below this one for about a mile, but this was the last one we would have had to run. He was drowned right between the swift water and the eddy, in the swirl. The accident happened about 10 a.m., and we got to the post about noon. Four of the boys went up after dinner and stayed all afternoon. We are going up again this morning . . .

THIS thing has overwhelmed me. I feel lost; the country overpowers me; it is so big, so untamed, so strong, and withal so magnificent.

Yours in sorrow

T O M.



"AN UPSET"

A charcoal sketch by the late Neil McKechnie.
Done at a composition class in the Winter of 1903

